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ABSTRACT

A study examined foreign students from one cultural background, Malaysia, in the American basic speech class to discover which areas they find most difficult and to discover those norms and values that cause these difficulties. Malaysian students were chosen as the focus of the study because Asian students comprise more than half of the total foreign student population (56%), and Malaysians constitute one of the largest groups among the Asian student groups. Ethnography was chosen as the study's principal approach because of its ability to provide what C. Geertz calls "thick description." Ethnography suited the research well because its qualitative and holistic approach helped to guard against ethnocentric aspects of some traditional approaches which force data into artificial categories. A total of 11 interviews were carried out with 2 major groups--Malays and Chinese Malaysians. Conclusions show that Malaysians have at least three main handicaps in a speech class: (1) they have a language barrier; (2) they come from a culture in which gesturing and speaking loudly are frowned upon; and (3) they have had no experience in their own countries speaking publicly. Interviews also led to suggestions about how to help Malaysian students in speech classes. Schools could offer remedial classes in English. Instructors could coach students individually, and take their disadvantages into account when evaluating them. (Contains 23 references.) (TB)

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Culture Shock in the Basic Communication Course: A Case Study of Malaysian Students

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Culture Shock in the Basic Communication Course: A Case Study of Malaysian Students

Abstract

Malaysian students comprise a large student group coming to the U.S. for higher education. Despite their numbers, however, there has been little attention given to their culture shock in the classroom. Through interviews with Malaysian students, this study concludes that Malaysian students perceive having three major problems in presenting speeches in basic communication courses.

The first is the language barrier. Another is that certain nonverbal behaviors such as gesturing and talking in a loud tone are seen as disrespectful in their culture. Thirdly, they have not had opportunities to speak in classrooms in their culture, thus this is a novel and distressing situation for them. In light of these findings, several suggestions for both teachers and Malaysian students are made.

Significance of the Problem

Foreign students constitute a significant factor in American institutions of higher education. During the academic year 1985/86, 343,777 foreign students were enrolled in American institutions while in the year 1992 there were 420,000 (Statistical Abstracts). Translated into economic terms, the United States devotes $2.5 billion to the education of students from other countries. Many graduate schools already acknowledge the significance of the foreign student factor, with approximately half of total enrollments comprised by overseas students in areas such as engineering and computer science (Altbach, 1985; Altbach, Kelly & Lulat, 1985; Scully, 1986).

Despite the large number of foreign students in the United States, few studies have been carried out on the topic of foreign students, and there has been a tendency6y for decisions regarding overseas students tobe based on political or diplomatic reasons, rather than the welfare of the student (Altbach, 1985). Existing literature on foreign students seem to concentrate in areas such as the adaptation process typically undergone by the foreign student in a new cultural environment and on the relation between academic success and such various factors as age, sex, marital status and language proficiency (Altbach, Kelly & Lulat, 1985). More specifically, literature on the academic performance of foreign students in public speaking classes is almost non-

existent, except for a few articles on Native American students' speeches, which should not be included in the category of literature on foreign students, in the strict sense.

The research literature examining foreign students generally deals with language proficiency which is considered to be one of the reasons why some foreign students show unsatisfactory academic performance (Heikinheimo & Schute, 1986; Altbach, Kelly & Lulat, 1985; Putman, 1961). Almost all American institutions of higher education have their own standards of English proficiency as a requirement for admittance of foreign students. According to one of the managers at the International Services at a large mid-western university, foreign students have to satisfy two linguistic test requirements for admission; the 500 TOEFL exam and an individualized English placement exam. Other American universities have similar requirements. This procedure, however, does not seem to guarantee prevention of linguistic difficulties in class, especially in such activities as reading assignments, note-taking and understanding exams, among others (Putman, 1961).

Besides these difficulties in general academic work due mainly to linguistic differences, there is the requirement in many classes to speak in front of native speakers, which, according to the literature, poses a problem for foreign students for a number of reasons. First, foreign students manifest a fear of appearing foolish in front of peers and

teachers, and feel stripped of their real selves and their real language capacities (Ludwig, 1982). Hull (1978) states that clearly the area most students perceived difficulties was related to speaking in the classroom, and cites a young woman from the former West Germany as saying that it is hard for foreign students who cannot speak and act spontaneously and who cannot express their thoughts accurately.

In addition to speaking in classes, there are courses which specifically require students to present speeches. These courses are also feared by native speaking students and can cause even more of a problem for the foreign student. Therefore the study of foreign students in American speech classes merits our attention. It seems logical that not only linguistic factors, but also cultural factors play a large role in foreign students' speech performance. The main theme of this paper is that culture shock, due to unfulfilled expectations, in turn caused by a cultural ignorance, can be prevented in students and teachers in public speaking courses. The key word to avoidance of culture shock is awareness, or knowledge on the part of the teacher and student, of each other's cultural rules.

Culture shock can be seen as having two components. The first pertains to the inability of the student to fully understand and relate to the intricacies of the host culture, so that the students lack adequate control of what happens to them in their new environment. The second

component is the gap between foreign students' expectations of the host culture and the realities they observe (Royeen, 1981). It is possible that teachers with foreign students in their classes who have cultural backgrounds unknown to them can also experience the same "culture shock" through interaction with these students. If expectations of foreign students are not fulfilled, and teachers are unable to fully understand and relate to their students, then it is possible that teachers will feel a lack of ability to control interaction with foreign students, thus resulting in a form of "culture shock". Scafe and Kontas(1982) offer advice to counter this situation. They state:

> In a bicultural or multicultural class, effective instruction and constructive feedback is dependent upon 1) the teacher's awareness of his or her own expectations as being culturally based and 2) the expansion of these expectations to adapt to students from differing cultures, with the explicit affirmation that several alternative ways of speaking are valid, depending on the situation (p. 252).

Review of Literature

Gumperz (1981) supports the thesis that cultural knowledge should be sought by teachers of multicultural classrooms by stating "When interpretations of behavior differ as they do in most ethnically mixed classrooms, there is no way to safeguard against cultural bias in evaluating

performance and to distinguish between differences in ability" (p.6). Classic studies on the effect of such nonverbal behavior as maintenance or avoidance of eye contact, interpersonal distance, and participation patterns on teacher/student interaction show that negative evaluations can result from ignorance of the "rules" of the other culture. There is a certain "grammar" of nonverbal communication that enables members to achieve or avoid a certain "personal relatedness." Incompetence, due to lack of knowledge, in this type of communication can bring serious consequences (Byers & Byers, 1972).

One example of the consequences of ignorance of the other's cultural rules is presented in an article on the needs of Indochinese students. When children keep their eyes down while talking to parents or teachers as a sign of respect, teachers who are not knowledgeable in the Indochinese students' cultural "grammar" may become frustrated, thinking that the students are not paying attention. Another norm in the Indochinese culture consists of avoiding tactile communication once they reach a certain maturity. "Teachers may hug elementary students and touch them, but the young males may get the wrong idea if a female teacher acts too familiar with them in high school" (Bui, 1983, p.21).

In addition to the language barrier and differences in nonverbal norms, there may be an additional factor to consider when considering the difficulties that foreign

students face when giving a speech. The concept of speech or public speaking may itself differ from the American view of this concept.

Different cultures attribute different values to the communicative act of speaking. This should be understood by the teacher in order to be able to help the foreign student learn the skills of public speaking, as it may be the underlying cultural values ingrained in the foreign student that is the main obstacle to performance in the public speaking class. For example, the Paliyans of South India communicate very little throughout their lives and even become almost completely silent by the age forty. "Verbal, communicative persons are regarded as abnormal and often offensive" (Gardner, 1966,p.368). For Native Americans, speech constitutes an unnecessary intrusion in the learning process and the culture stresses the importance of observation and participation. Black American culture also seems to make greater use of direct observation, rather than expended verbal explanations in their classrooms (Edwards, 1983).

These are only a few selected examples of differences in the concept of speaking itself. Therefore, students with different cultural backgrounds may attribute different meanings to the concept of speech, and not surprisingly, this may be a significant factor influencing their performance in American public speaking classes. The ultimate problem lies in holding one standard for all

students of diverse cultures and evaluating them according to this uniform yardstick. Siler and Labadie-Wondergem put this point succinctly in their article "Cultural factors in the organization of speeches by Native Americans" by saying "Therefore, of minority students fail to measure up to acceptable standards of the overculture, they are penalized" (1982, p.93).

On the other hand, however, a different argument can be voiced on this issue. One may say that by overcompensating for the handicaps of the foreign student, one may forfeit the purpose of teaching the course. In other words, they may say that if students enroll in public speaking classes, there is a certain level of performance that is expected of them. Again, the key word "knowledge" or "awareness" can help solve this dilemma. First, teachers should be aware of the cultural nuances influencing a foreign student's performance, and secondly, the students themselves should be aware of the fact that there are certain principles that are being taught in the public speech class that may be different from the students' traditional views of speaking. With this knowledge, the students can at least make a conscious choice by knowing that adhering to certain principles will affect their performance and ultimately, their evaluation in class. In other words, as Dauplinais(1980) states, " If students are provided specific instruction about styles appropriate in both cultures and then given the opportunity to practice these styles, they

can make decisions regarding the appropriateness of communication behavior and can discern the consequences of the lack of appropriate behavior" (p. 85).

The issue in question is the same issue that has be plaguing multilingual and multicultural classrooms, regardless of the subject taught. There are three classical views on this issue; "Anglo conformity," "the melting pot" and "cultural pluralism".

The Anglo conformity theory demanded complete renunciation of the immigrant's ancestral culture in favor of the behavior and values of the Anglo-Saxon core group. By contrast, the melting pot idea proposed a biological merger of Anglo-Saxon people with other immigrant groups. Along with the intermarriage there would be a blending of their cultures in a new, single, native "American type." Cultural pluralism favored the preservation of the communal life and significant portions of the culture of the later immigrant groups within the context of American citizenship (Burger, 1973, p.5)

The latter view seems to be the one currently most favored by education experts and is the one that forms the basis of this paper. The reason for taking this stance will be supported in the specific illustration of Native American speech patterns and the resulting performance and evaluation in class.

Several articles have dealt with the difference between speech patterns of Native American students and students of

the WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant) culture. The first difference was that Native American students seemed unorganized and seemed to be "rambling". Careful analysis showed that these student did not use any sort of markers to show where the speech was headed, but just moved from one main point to another. The authors posited that for the Native American speakers, the relationships between topics is implicit, that is, that the main points are implicitly related to the subject of the speech, thereby negating the necessity of markers or signposts to show relationships (Cooley & Lujan, 1982).

The authors also found that Native Americans tended to most often use the reference as a cohesive device. In other words, they made extensive use of pronouns to give the speech text a sense of unity. A third difference was the use of "reported speech" in Native American students' speeches. Such phrases as "I was told that" or "What was told to me was" were often used. The authors conclude that while the speeches may seem unorganized to a person viewing the Native American speech from a Narrow perspective, the speeches actually are based on a different set of culturally bound rules for public speech.

Other authors found different idiosyncratic speech patterns among Native Americans such as the prevalent use of the topical pattern of organization, the sustained, flowing and circular nature of Navajo gestures in contrast to Anglos' angular and staccato motions and the disclaiming of

credibility. While traditional American speech norms advocate building credibility in the eyes of the audience, Native Americans are taught not to refer to themselves as experts but rather as humble offerers of an opinion. In this same vein, Navajo speakers confine their role as speaker to offering information and not suggesting that one piece of information is more important than the other. They consider their audience as active, responsible people who are capable of making up their own minds (Siler & Labadie-Wondergem, 1982; Burger, 1973; Scafe & Kontas, 1982). This may be due to the fact that while the Western culture adheres to doctrinal exclusivism and conflictual dualism, the Native Americans place emphasis on such values as order, harmony and balance. Philipsen (1972), who made the able statement in the article "Navajo world view and culture patterns of speech: A case study in ethnorhetoric" claims that "While the Platonic-Aristotelian difference over absolute and probable truth is a fundamental controversy in traditional theory, the distinction is culture-bound and not a useful one when applied to the Navajo" (p.133).

Purpose and Scope of Study

The purpose of this paper is to examine foreign students from one cultural background, Malaysia, in the American basic speech class in order to find specifically the areas which they are apt to find most difficult and seek

the underlying cultural norms and values that cause these phenomena. Malaysian students were chosen as the focus of study because according to statistics, Asian students comprise more than half of the total foreign student population at 56%, and Malaysian are one of the largest groups among the Asian student groups (Snyder,1992). Another factor for this choice as the focus of study was that many of these students were enrolled in Architecture and other departments that require speech classes in their curriculum. A combination of these factors made them the most appropriate national group to study, given the purpose of this investigation.

Malaysian Culture

Background information about Malaysian culture is important to have in studying students from that culture. There are three ethnic cultures in Malaysia. The Malays for the most part tend to the agriculture of Malaysia, and seem to receive governmental assistance to help them improve their standard of living. Chinese Malaysians are numerically strong in business, and most of them believe in Buddhism, rather than the Moslem religion, which is the dominant faith of the Malays. Indian Malaysians for the most part make their living through labor, and only a few among them are well off economically.

English is taught as early as second grade of primary school, but the emphasis is on reading and writing, not on spoken English. Religion seems to play the most significant role in Moslem believers' lives, affecting them in many ways. The influence of religion seems less for Buddhist believers because they state "If I have to pick a religion, it would be Buddhism." However, in both of these religions, norms advocate that women be subjugated to men. As one student says, "Women should not work and should obey to their husbands." the Moslem religion, however, seems to have stricter norms concerning sexual propriety, especially for women. For example, one student said "You need a distance of about three feet [between opposites sexes] because of sexual attraction."

In general, Malaysian students stated that there were individual differences in how one viewed the act of speaking in their culture. However, most of them agreed that there was a certain difference in the older and younger generations' views of speaking. They stated that the older generation tended to dislike verbose people, more than the younger generation. Many also believed that their culture endorses speaking "indirectly", while the Western culture views outspokenness as a virtue.

Research Questions

Although the focus of this study is the analysis fo Malaysian students' speeches to discern potential areas of difficulty and Malaysian students' perceptions of causes for these difficulties, the specific research questions asked are:

1. What are some of the potential problem areas for Malaysian student when presenting a speech in an American public speaking class?
    a. What are the Malaysian students' perceptions of the public speaking experience?
    b. What are their teachers' perceptions?
2. What specific cultural values or norms are believed to cause these difficulties, either directly or indirectly?

Method

Although quantitative methods are useful in establishing credibility in terms of numbers, and can thus be considered more generalizeable than qualitative methods, for the purposes of this study, the qualitative method seems to be more appropriate. the qualitative method was chosen because of its ability to avoid pushing the subject into artificial categories and because this study is most interested in the perceptions of the foreign student and the

speech teacher, rather than in generating, although that in itself can be useful.

More specifically, ethnography was chosen as its principle approach because of its ability to provide "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography serves the purposes of this paper well because its qualitative and holistic approach helps guard against the ethnocentric aspects of traditional research that can occur with the imposition of "artificial categories" mentioned above.

The qualitative approach was chosen, rather than the quantitative because the difference between the Malaysian and American cultures precluded the use of surveys for this research. This is because concepts and operational definitions may differ because of linguistic or cultural differences. A Malaysian may have a different view of the concept of a speech to begin with, thus leading to an answer that may be irrelevant to the question. As qualitative methodologists have stated, "Quantitative measurements are quantitatively accurate; qualitative evaluations are always subject to the errors of human judgement. Yet it would seem far more worthwhile to make a shrewd guess regarding that which is essential than to accurately measure that which is likely to prove irrelevant" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

The qualitative approach is especially well-suited for the purposes of this paper because, as Becker stated, in qualitative studies, those whom society ignores often receive a form for their views, as the qualitative

researcher seeks not "truth" or "morality" but rather a detailed understanding of other peoples' perspectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Among the qualitative methods, a combination of focus group and individual interview methods will be used for this project. Focus group interviewing was chosen for its utility in looking at topics which arise naturally, rather than the interviewer unilaterally deciding on what topics need to be discussed. In addition, a method called "member validation was used during the focus group meeting in which "... the member is asked to judge whether or not he or she recognizes the sociologist's account as a legitimate elaboration and systematization of the member's account. The member judges whether or not the sociologist's account seems familiar in that it refers to, and originates in, elements similar to those in the member's stock of common-sense knowledge" (Bloor, 1983, p.156). Although this method is used for sociological research, it may also be feasible for qualitative research in other domains, such as this, and be a method of validating the interpretations of the author.

In short, this study used a blend of qualitative research methods to seek to answer the question: What are the most prominant areas of difficulty for the Malaysian student in the American speech class, and what are the underlying causes of these difficulties?

Participants

A total of eleven interviews were carried out with Malaysian student of the two major ethnic groups, Malays and Chinese Malaysians, who believed in the two major religions; the Moslem religion and Buddhism. Malays tended to be Moslem and Chinese Malaysians were mostly of the Buddhist faith. The third major ethnic group, Indian Malaysians were unable to be interviewed because of the extremely small number of students on campus. According to the students interviewed, there were only two Indian Malaysians on the whole campus.

Five female students were interviewed, all of them being Malays of the Moslem faith except for one Chinese Malaysian who was Buddhist. Five male students were interviewed. Two were Malays who were of the Moslem faith, while the other three were Chinese Malaysians who were Buddhists.

Most of the Malay students were government sponsored, while the Chinese Malaysians were, for the most part, in the United States by means of private funding. All of the Malaysian students interviewed too Speech class because they were required to do so. They were mostly business majors, with a few in engineering.

In addition to interviewing the Malaysian students, three interviews with instructors who currently had Malaysian students enrolled in their classes were completed.

These were also carried out between early October and late November, and care was taken to schedule the interviews after having spoken to the students first, in order to avoid biasing the questioning process and the interpretation of the data. The interviews with instructors took less time than the interviews with students, presumably because of lack of linguistic barriers. Two female and one male instructor was interviewed.

Individual Interviews

Malaysian students were contacted through the instructors who had these students enrolled in their basic speech classes, through word of mouth, and also by contact the Malaysian student association. The interviews were all conducted in the author's office, with prior permission to use the tape recorder, and an outline of the topics to be covered during the interview, for the interviewer's own reference. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to over one hour. These interviews started in early October, and ended one week before Thanksgiving break. An average of two or three interviews were conducted each week during the six weeks of interviewing, and they were conducted during week days only.

While carrying out the interviews, the interviewer felt she had made a good choice in choosing the interview format instead of asking them to fill out survey instruments.

Their fluency in English was overall very good when compared to other foreign students, but misunderstandings frequently occurred, making it necessary to probe for inconsistencies, in order to collect valid data. The interviewees were in general quite willing to be interviewed, and answered questions freely and fully.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interview took place in the interviewer's office. Effort was made to get at least one member of each ethnic group and religion and sex. Three female students, two Malay and one Chinese Malaysian, and one Chinese Malaysian male student attended the meeting. The Malay male student who had missed his appointment one before had agreed to attend, and failed to a second time, resulting in an absence of male Malay representatives. The interview was audiotaped with prior consent of the interviewees, and the interviewer informed them that the recorder could be turned off at any time if it made them uncomfortable.

The interviewer was expecting the members to bring up topics spontaneously and discuss whatever was on their minds concerning speech presentation, however they were reluctant to do so, perhaps because of cultural reasons. In countries

with "high power distance", to use Hofstede (1980)'s concept, students will wait for the eldest, the interviewer in this situation, to speak. When a topic was brought up, they spoke spontaneously one after another, but expected the interviewer to bring up new topics to discuss. Therefore, the meeting served mainly as a method of validating the author's interpretations of the data gathered earlier during individual interviews.

Discussion

Students are not typically given any opportunities to present their ideas before others under the Malaysian educational system. This seems to greatly influence the Malaysian students' performance in speech classes, since the unfamiliarity of the role, from that of a passive recipient of knowledge to that of an active prononent of ideas, leads to excessive awkwardness, when compared to American students, who are already acquainted with having an active role in classroom situations.

The problem that the majority of students interviewed stated as their "biggest problem" in giving speeches was the lack of fluency in a foreign language. As one student put it, "I'm happy if I can get through to them... usually, I have to try twice...restructuring sentences." Many of them professed they thought in their own language and tried to translate their thoughts into English when giving speeches.

this inevitably led to awkward pauses when students were searching for words. It also took several trials to get the sentence structure just right. Students also had trouble with pronunciation and intonation, and found themselves searching for synonyms to avoid repeating the same words. In short, for a majority of Malaysian students, their greatest fear is linguistic inadequacy. As one student put it, "I am afraid they won't understand".

Some students declared proudly that they had found a way out of the dilemma by memorizing the whole speech text. In reality, memorization only serves to exascerbate the problem, because as most speech teachers warn, once students forget their place, they tend to panic and to do poorly on the rest of the speech.

Students seemed to feel that the organization of ideas was not problematic at all for them. All of them asserted that they were provided with much practice in the organization of ideas in their Malay and English language classes, where composition or "essay-writing" was required regularly. They also felt that they volume of their voice did not pose problems. Interestingly enough, among the three instructors interviewed, two felt that the Malaysian students "wandered" from point to point in their speeches and that Malaysian students tended to speak too softly. One student said "I thought I spoke loud, but the instructor said he could not hear me." This could be an area that Malaysian students should be guided to work on, especially

since there is the risk of non-recognition by the student of a potential problem that instructors point out as needing improvement.

On the subject of using natural gestures to accompany and stress what is being said, students said that using gestures was viewed by their culture as being disrespectful, as was talking loudly. This could have been the cause for Malaysian students' unnatural gestures and inaudible tone. One student stated, "I put hand in pocket and the other was going round and round." After talking to the students individually, it was still hard to find a pattern to explain why some students perceived the use of gestures while giving speeches as problematic, while others did not seem to do so. Finally, a pattern was discerned. Problems in using gestures decreased as a function of the time spent in the United States. One student asserted that she used "more gestures now than before".

Interpretation of students' perceptions of eye contact as a potential problem area was more complex. In general, for female students of both ethnic backgrounds, eye contact proved to be a problem. One female Moslem student said "When I see American face, I start nervous. I just talk, talk, talk, without looking any point. When I stopped, I tried to look but I don't know what I am looking [at]." Difficulties with eye contact for female students seemed to stem from two sources. For one, according to the Moslem religion, eye contact is associated with sexual promiscuity,

while in Buddhism, direct eye contact is seen as a challenge to superiors. Therefore, in order to avoid being promiscuous or challenging to males, who are deemed "superior", eye contact is avoided. The second, is that eye contact is seen as a means of feedback from the audience, and since Malaysian students are understandably more apprehensive about their speech performance, they fear looking at their audience. One student put it this way:

If you say something, you expect the audience will give some...let's say feedback. Seeing from their face we can see whether they understand what we say, so it's kind of the audience may reflect what you feel...When I'm giving a speech and I look at their face, if they look miserable, I know that they don't understand what I say so I feel depressed and kind of affect what I'm going to say.

Among the male Malaysian students, Chinese Malaysians stated that they had no problems with eye contact during speech presentations, while Malay students had mixed perceptions. One asserted that avoiding eye contact was "part of our culture," while others denied having any problems at all with eye contact.

Conclusion

Interviews with Malaysian students lead to the conclusion that Malaysian students perceive that they have three main handicaps they have to deal with when presenting speeches in American basic speech classes. The first is the language barrier. Many students cited language as the biggest problem they had in giving speeches. Another handicap is that they come from a different culture where gesturing and talking loudly are seen as "disrespectful", especially for women. When these are some core aspects that instructors focus on when evaluating speeches, it becomes problematic to use the same yardstick to evaluate these students, because the evaluations could penalize the students for having attributes of their own culture ingrained in them. The third is that students have not had opportunities to present ideas orally in their own country. This lack of training could lead to an inferior level of performance, and consequently a lower grade, when compared to those who have received training.

Several suggestions can be made in consideration of these perceived handicaps. For example, remedial classes for English proficiency can be offered to Malaysian students taking speech performance classes. The instructor can also coach these students individually, on how to concentrate on getting the message across, even if it means settling for using a word other than the one originally sought. The

instructor can also help students acquire the skills of vocalization and effective gesturing.

McCroskey (1980) states that one can help students from minority cultures to learn, by first becoming acquainted with the cultural norms for communication of that person, and following with steps that include avoiding evaluation on factors such as accent or dialect, which cannot be easily nor rapidly changed (p.241). These are the measures that instructors with Malaysian students in their classes are advised to take, and this paper attempted to help speech instructors in getting to know the cultural norms of Malaysian students. Care should be taken to ensure the students that their cultural norms are not necessarily better or worse than the norms required in American public speaking classes, but that in order to learn how to be a better speaker, one needs to acquire specific skills.

In order to deal with the lack of familiarity in presenting speeches, the third perceived problem area, instructors need to take this lack of training into consideration and evaluate them fairly, i.e. take care not to penalize them for what they have not had an opportunity to learn. American students have a distinct advantage over Malaysian students because they are encouraged at an early age to express their ideas in front of their classmates, unlike their Malaysian counterparts.

This paper has reviewed some of the perceptions of Malaysian students and their instructors, on their public

speech experience. There are several shortcomings of the paper, including the small number of instructors interviewed, and the fact that only one female Chinese Malaysian student could be interviewed. The author will be content, however if this paper is read by speech communication instructors, and understanding is enhanced on topics such as Malaysian students' perceptions of their areas of difficulty, and the underlying cultural norms that guide Malaysian students' behaviors. This is only the first step in helping Malaysian students in the basic communication course. If instructors are made aware of these potential problem areas, and if students are made to be aware of the areas that they may be downgraded on in evaluations, this will be the first step towards avoiding culture shock in the speech communication classroom, and a step towards ensuring that students, whatever their cultural background may be, are helped to learn to their fullest potential.

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